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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Letter dated 4 June 2015 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I write to you with reference to the high-level conference on the theme "UNRWA at 65: sustaining human development and protecting rights of Palestine refugees", which was convened under your auspices on 2 June 2015 on the occasion of 65 years of operation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The conference, including the high-level plenary meeting and panel sessions, provided an important opportunity to reflect upon the continuing plight of the Palestine refugees over the 67 years since *Al-Nakba* of 1948, including the opportunity to listen to testimonies by Palestine refugees from the region, who presented compelling testimonies about the realities of their plight and the hardships they are enduring. Moreover, it was a timely opportunity to acknowledge the remarkable work done by UNRWA in providing humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as opportunities for human development to the Palestine refugees for 65 years, since its establishment in 1950, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 302 (IV); to acknowledge also the vital support of the host countries — Jordan, Lebanon and Syria — for the Agency and the Palestine refugees over the decades, and of the international donor community, whose voluntary contributions have made the UNRWA humanitarian mission possible; to assess the many serious challenges facing the Palestine refugees and UNRWA at this time; and to renew the support and commitment of the international community for UNRWA and for a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, the foremost of which is General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which is essential for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. In that regard, I have the honour to attach herewith the Chair's summary, which was read out at the conference by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Pierre Krähenbühl (see annex).

In closing, I reaffirm our gratitude, on behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership, for the long-standing, principled support — political, financial and

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moral — of the international community for the Palestine refugees and for the mandate of UNRWA, recognizing the special role played in particular by the members and observers of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA. I underscore the need for continued support, and indeed the urgency of strengthening support at this time, to alleviate the grave and immense hardships being endured by the Palestine refugees, particularly as a result of the conflicts and instability wracking the region, pending the achievement of a just and lasting solution and the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 50.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations

Annex to the letter dated 4 June 2015 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

UNRWA at 65: sustaining human development and protecting rights of Palestine refugees

2 June 2015, New York

Member States and observers of the United Nations met today in New York, at the invitation of the Secretary-General, to commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the commencement of operations by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Participants recalled that Palestine refugees represent the world's largest and most protracted refugee situation. Participants welcomed the highly significant and enduring contribution that UNRWA has made to the human development and protection of successive generations of Palestine refugees registered with the Agency, which currently serves 5.2 million people. Participants underlined the significant contributions to the collective effort made by hosts, who shoulder significant economic, financial and other responsibilities, by donors, by partners and by Palestine refugees themselves. Participants recognized in particular the commitment of UNRWA staff members, who have worked tirelessly on behalf of Palestine refugees, and paid special tribute to those who have lost their lives serving the Agency.

Looking forward, participants expressed great concern about the growing disparity between the increasing needs of Palestine refugee and the resources available to the Agency, whose structural underfunding, reflected in its recurring and escalating core budget deficits, remains unresolved. Participants noted also that the emergency appeals of UNRWA are underfunded at a time when the Agency is increasingly being called upon to provide extensive emergency assistance to the Palestine refugee community, notably in Syria, where virtually the entire Palestine refugee community, including those in and around Yarmouk, now need assistance; in Gaza, where UNRWA has a significant role to play in repairing the huge damage caused by the 2014 conflict and in mitigating the impact of the ongoing blockade; and in the West Bank, Lebanon and Jordan, where the Agency also provides assistance to Palestine refugees. Those challenges are compounded by the sharply deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in the region affecting all fields of operation. Participants expressed concern at the growing prevalence, among large parts of the Palestine refugee community, of poverty and vulnerability, the lack of enjoyment of basic human rights and the increasing risk of marginalization.

Participants underlined that those challenges must be met so that all Palestine refugees will have access to high quality education and be given the opportunity to lead healthy, self-reliant and dignified lives as envisaged in the UNRWA medium-term strategy for the period 2016-2021. Participants welcomed the focus at the conference on promoting the protection of vulnerable Palestine refugee groups, including women, children, young people and persons with disabilities, as well as those in situations of conflict, and emphasized that the protection of Palestine refugees through the delivery of the Agency's services and the engagement of relevant parties, must continue to be at the core of the work of UNRWA. In line with those objectives, participants underlined the need for donors to fulfil pledges, with

the goal of providing predictable, adequate and sustainable support to the Agency, and invited new and potential donors to do the same. At the same time, participants called upon UNRWA to carry out its mandate efficiently, focusing on the delivery of its core services, and to build and strengthen mutually reinforcing partnerships with relevant actors in both the private and public sectors.

Participants underscored the vital role of UNRWA in contributing to regional stability, until a just, lasting and agreed solution of the Palestine refugee question is reached, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolutions 194 (III) and 302 (IV). Participants expressed their commitment to continue addressing the needs of Palestine refugees, until such a solution is found.